

Isaiah 58:6-12 ~ John 21:1-17  
Reformation 2.0: Go Deep  
November 5, 2017

### **Introduction to John 21**

In our Gospel lesson, we jump ahead about 500 years and find ourselves inside another story on another day, where instead of the prophet Isaiah, it's the recently Risen Christ who appears to his disoriented, broken, confused disciples. At this point in the narrative world of John, the disciples are still wondering, what happened? How did things get so bad so fast, that their Lord, their Rabbouni, their Messiah, the Son of God, was crucified on a cross? And they had done nothing to stop it. Yet now he has risen from the dead, appearing first to Mary Magdalene, and then to the disciples in the house in the locked room not once, but twice. All this was amazing, but also scary. Let's face it: Jesus' final hours were not their finest. They had all abandoned him when he needed them the most. So what should they do, now?

We'll leave it to hyperactive, super-reactive Simon Peter to decide he's got to do *something*. He can't just sit around on his hands anymore. He was a fisherman before all this. So, what else to do, but go fishing? And the others tag along. They fish all night... Surely their hands had gotten soft in the last three years since they left their trade, so as the night dragged on the nets burned new blisters on the inside of their fingers. And not only that, they seem to have lost their knack for catching fish. They fished and fished and caught nothing. No matter how hard they tried. Just empty nets, burning fingers, aching shoulders, and broken hearts. Would the sun ever come up again? Let's see as we listen for God's holy word in this reading from John 21, taking note of the actions and the words of our Risen Christ, Prophet, Redeemer, Grill cook/breakfast chef, and friend.

### **Sermon**

In a high school practice, Aaron Rodgers once threw a ball 75 yards. "Mastering the precision of his deep ball for the Green Bay Packers offense, however, was a different story," writes Packers reporter Rob Demovsky. He quotes Aaron Rodgers who confessed, "It's something I struggled with. I always had a strong arm and just wanted to zip everything." He has no such problems now. Since Rodgers became the Packers' starter in 2008, no one has thrown more touchdown passes on deep balls that traveled 35 yards or more in the air, according to ESPN Stats. From Rodgers' perspective, however, it's not just chuck and duck. There's a precision to it. In his mind's eye, he sees a spot that he calls "The Red Line," a mark between the sideline and the painted numbers on the field that serves as an aiming point. Yes, apparently Aaron Rodgers likes to "Go Deep" and has developed it into a fine art. When it works and both collarbones are intact he's unstoppable.

What Aaron Rodgers probably doesn't realize is that injured or not, he is taking a page out of Jesus' playbook. The page that says, "don't go shallow, go deep." That's the play that Jesus was reviewing, reengaging in his postgame huddle with

Simon Peter, his fouled up quarterback by the Sea of Tiberias. You will recall that Peter had gone shallow, very shallow, when he was warming himself at the fire on the night before Jesus was crucified. We can't know for sure, but it seems like Peter got scared and choked. Just as Jesus had predicted he would. When the servant girl asked Peter if he was with Jesus, he denied it. Not once, but three times. Now that Jesus had been arrested, Peter didn't want to let her know whose team he was on. He forgot who he was. He messed up. But we learn from our story today, thanks to Coach Jesus, that was *not* how Peter's story ended. Peter was not kicked off the team. Instead Jesus fed him, had a fireside heart-to-heart talk with him, repaired the breach, restored their friendship and sent him back in the game.

What about our story here, today now about 2000 years since that breakfast on the beach with Jesus? We are on the cusp, on the edge of a new chapter as well, a *hinge* time in more ways than one. Your "between pastors" interim period is over! All those months, with all those Sundays since your former pastor, Dr. Kevin Buchanan left and you found your new pastor are over. On that note, I want to take a moment to thank your faithful rotation of talented pulpit supply preachers – two of them are here today, Janet Wolfe and Dan Crump, and the other two who are not here. Sundays do come around with relentless regularity and many people, the Worship Committee, the CE Committee, the Session, the Deacons, Jim Gates who moderated the session, and others I am failing to name but you know who they are, have stepped up, taken initiative, filled in the gap, kept the fires burning: Well done, good and faithful servants!

Moving beyond us, FPC Marshfield, this is also a *hinge* time in the much larger context of the history of Christendom. As Janet Wolfe preached about on October 22, we have not just passed the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Protestant Reformation last Tuesday night. Yep: you thought it was just Halloween, right? Who went Trick or Treating, or passed out candy to the costumed beggars? You may still have candy in a bags or plastic pumpkin bowls (at least the less popular varieties) and discarded costumes to remember Tuesday night's Trick or Treating. Definitely fun and a favorite holiday for many.

But Tuesday was also the night that marked exactly 500 years since Martin Luther, in Wittenberg, Germany posted his 95 theses outlining in no uncertain terms, 95 ways the church had "gone shallow." He pulled no punches in naming the multiple ways the church's playbook contradicted and offended the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ; the worst of which being the commodification of God's grace, in the selling of indulgences. I'm thinking he chose that night because it was All Hallows' Eve, the night before All Saints Day, November 1, when traditionally the veil between heaven and earth becomes as thin as gossamer and we can feel the presence of those who have passed on to heaven before us. Perhaps Martin Luther was enlisting their support in his protest. Or doing his best to honor them and their legacy.

In her book titled, *The Great Emergence*, Phyllis Tickle lifts up the observation of The Right Reverend Mark Dyer, an Anglican bishop, “that about every five hundred years the church feels compelled to hold a giant rummage sale; where traditions of the church get sorted and some ditched entirely—the ones which no longer makes sense.” He and Phyllis Tickle argue that we are living in and through one of those five hundred year sales right now and that this “Great Emergence” as to take heart because history teaches us that when this mighty upheaval happens, caused a new, more vital form of Christianity emerges.<sup>i</sup>

Our Silent Auction items (while not exactly a rummage sale) add to the visual aura of this hinge time, on our hinge day today. Of course neither the Protestant Reformation, nor “The Great Emergence,” or what I am calling Reformation 2.0, actually began on one day. We assign them a day because they are convenient place markers, to give us a handle on a major event. It’s kind of like the way becoming an adult does not necessarily happen the day you turn 21 years old. I feel the same way about my call to be your pastor and I’m sure your PNC would agree it’s hard to pinpoint when it became clear that God was calling me to be your pastor. Yet here we are, thanks be to God, and thanks to my husband, Bob. He is the one who first spied your Church Information Form and Web site and called out to me from our living room one evening while I was in the kitchen cooking dinner. “You’ve got to come look at this one!” To which I replied, “Where’s Marshfield, WI?” And the rest is history! Thanks be to God, the Holy Spirit working through my husband, the PNC, the Winnebago Presbytery, and all of you.

So here we are. How to begin? Let’s jump in! Picture Simon Peter, jumping in to get to Jesus as quick as he could. All in with body, mind and spirit. Let’s jump in and “go deep” together. Deep into the heart of Jesus, who comes to the shore of our lives to feed us, restore us, and send us to be his body in the world today. There’s a world of hurt that is calling our name. This hinge time in our lives gives us a chance to reset, regroup, and ask the deeper question: who is God is calling us to be, and what God is calling us to do. How are we being called to bear witness to Christ’s love and divine justice, to restore the breach and repair the fractures in our own hearts and relationships, as well as the ones in our Marshfield community? We begin with this question, what is breaking the heart of God here in Marshfield, in our country and our world, right now?

In the first chapter of Jim Wallis’ (founder of Sojourners, author, public theologian) recent book, *The (Un)Common Good: How the Gospel Brings Hope to a World Divided*, he writes about the need to “go deep” as the way forward in our polarized political climate. “As people of faith, our challenge is to rise above political ideology and lead on moral grounds. Don’t go right, don’t go left; go deeper. The common good is about so much more than partisan politics. It grows out of our personal and family lives, our vocational callings, the mission and witness of our congregations, the moral power of social movements, and the independent integrity of prophetic religious leadership in our public life as we fight not just for our rights but for the rights of all people.”<sup>ii</sup> Yes, we have to “go deep” to access our moral

courage. We have to “go deep” to be non-conformists, like Martin Luther. We must ask the hard questions: How are we selling out the Gospel these days? What are the 95 theses that we need to post in 2017 to move “The Great Emergence” along?

Well first, I need to learn your names. And how to unlock the doors of the church on Sunday morning. Yes: here on day one we have much to learn about each other, about the ways we are uniquely equipped to jump in and put ourselves out there in the name of Christ’s divine love. What I do know already is that wherever you are in your relationship with Jesus, that is exactly where he meets you at this table. Whatever your doubts and fears: Jesus has cooked you some fish and bread and is ready to ask us, “Do you love me more than these?”

Jesus put his body on the line for each of us and for all of us. That’s what the meal at this table is all about. Jesus came to save the whole world, the whole earth: creation and all its creatures. And now he needs us to do the same: to heal, restore, to find common ground respecting the image of God in every soul. Where to begin? By jumping in and saying, “yes, we are broken” and “yes, Jesus, heal me, heal us.” That takes moral courage. That takes swimming against the stream of our shallow and selfish age. That takes a church doing its best to be the body of Christ.

I believe God called me here to “go deep” with you. I’m thrilled and challenged by the thought of all we will learn and do together by the power of Christ’s love working in and through us. Standing here in front of you, I see you shimmering with untapped potential to build in new ways on the great legacy already in place. Yes, church is exactly where we can go deep, together.

Like Aaron Rodgers said about his deep ball, “It’s not just “chuck and duck.” For us the precision to which God calls us, *our* aiming point is Jesus. Are we keeping Jesus front and center? As Aaron Rodgers’ said, it takes practice and patience, trial and error. The same is true for us. I will make mistakes and so will you. We will make mistakes together. But here’s the good news (1) we can learn more from our errors and failures than our successes, if we choose to; (2) and here’s the bottom line: We are Easter people. Love wins. As long as we stay in the game. Do you have an impulse just to “zip everything” the way Aaron Rodgers said that he does? Simon Peter had that impulse too. If we’re honest, I think most of us do: we depend on our knee jerk surface impulse, rather than taking a breath and letting God help us look through Jesus’ eyes and heart. Let’s take a breath and jump into this brand new 500 years that we were born to be a part of—and go deep, to the glory of God, together.

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<sup>i</sup> Phyllis Tickle, *The Great Emergence: How Christianity is Changing and Why*, (Baker Books, Grand Rapids, MI, 2008), pp.16-17.

<sup>ii</sup> Jim Wallis, *The (Un)Common Good: How the Gospel Brings Hope to a World Divided*, ( Brazos, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 2014), p. 5.